# Religion on Twitter : communalization in event-based hashtag discourses

Aeschbach, Mirjam ; Lüddeckens, Dorothea

online
Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet
Institute for Religious Studies - University of Heidelberg

Andrea Rota, Oliver Krüger (Eds.)

# The Dynamics of Religion, Media, and Community

**Special Issue**

Volume 14 (2019)

HEIDELBERG
UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING

# Table of Contents

Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet, Volume 14 (2019)

As an open-access journal, *Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* can be permanently accessed free of charge from the website of HEIDELBERG UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING (http://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de).

ISSN 1861-5813





**Guest Editors for this Issue:**
Oliver Krüger
Andrea Rota

**Contributors to this Issue:**
Mirjam Aeschbach
Fabian Huber
Tim Hutchings
Isabelle Jonveaux
Dorothea Lüddeckens
Anna Neumaier
Andrea Rota
Alessandra Vitullo



# Religion on Twitter

## Communalization in Event-Based Hashtag Discourses

Mirjam Aeschbach and Dorothea Lüddeckens

**Abstract**

In this article, we examine the question of religious communalization on the micro-blogging service Twitter. Twitter has only relatively recently been adopted as a field of research by scholars of media and religion, and the question of religious community building on Twitter has yet to be addressed. Along with conceptualizations of Twitter as a social network and a social medium, we present specific approaches to community and the emergence of communal identity. Drawing on theories of community building online as well as offline, this study emphasizes mediated communication as central in the formation of community. Finally, through an analysis of postings under the hashtag #WhatBritishMuslimsReallyThink, we outline how Twitter is used for event-based communication and emotional affiliation. In this way, Twitter is conceptualized as a digital space in which fleeting communities may emerge in the process of communicative event communalization.

**Keywords**

Twitter; Social media; Digital religion; Community

## 1 Introduction

"An Inconvenient Truth: What British Muslims Really Think." Thus reads the title of an article published in the *Sunday Times*[1] on April 10, 2016. The article was written by Trevor Phillips, former

[1] With a circulation per issue averaging 767,016 in 2016, the *Sunday Times* is among the top 10 best-selling newspapers in Britain (Audit Bureau of Circulations, accessed October 3, 2016, http://www.abc.org.uk/). Furthermore, statistics indicate that, in the year 2016, around 6.5 million people were reached by the *Sunday Times* or its website (Statista, accessed August 13, 2018, https://www.statista.com/statistics/386877/the-times-the-sunday-times-monthly-reach-in-the-uk/). The article was published both in the print and online versions of the *Sunday Times*.

chairman of the British Commission for Racial Equality. As a well-known public figure, Phillips advocates the necessity of immigrants to assimilate to 'British values' and opposes multiculturalism, which he sees as having "led to isolated communities, in which some people think special separate values ought to apply" (Kundnani 2007, p. 27). Moreover, he has argued that Muslim values and practices, particularly with regard to the veil (Khiabany & Williamson 2008, p. 81), are in stark contrast to "what being British is about" (Kundnani 2007, p. 27). In the article "An Inconvenient Truth," Phillips presents himself as the one who "played a principal role in the creation of UK laws against religious discrimination [and who] first introduced the term Islamophobia to Britain" (Phillips 2016, p. 2), thereby pre-empting potential criticism. He further argues that, while "they [Muslims] seemed no different from the rest of us […] that just isn't how it is" (2016, p. 1). According to Phillips, this was revealed by a survey commissioned by Channel 4[2] "to get a better understanding of British Muslims' attitudes to living in Britain [and to] social issues including gender equality, homosexuality and issues relating to freedom of expression and the degree of sympathy for the use of violence and terrorist acts".[3] In his article, Phillips demarcates the boundaries of British national belonging along these lines, i.e., along assumed values regarding freedom, sexuality and gender, and the use of violence. He thereby presents Muslims as "a nation within a nation" (Phillips 2016, p. 2) and as a potential threat in terms of terrorism as well as gendered violence.[4]

This focus on Islam as "a dangerous cultural 'other' and as a potential 'enemy within'" as well as on questions "about the 'loyalty and belonging' of Muslims living in Britain" (Moore, Mason & Lewis 2008, p. 6) has been identified as a frequent staple in British print media outlets (Meer, Dwyer & Modood 2010; Moore, Mason & Lewis 2008). New media technologies have been conceptualized as potentially allowing "for connectivity and interactivity [that] can be harnessed for countering dominant representations [and] enhancing dialogue" (Poole & Richardson 2010, p. 6). This study focuses on how British Muslims use social media, and particularly the social media platform Twitter, as a means to engage with the contents published in the *Sunday Times*.

Launched in 2006, Twitter was introduced as a platform where user-generated content could be published in the form of microposts ('tweets') of a maximum of 140 characters,[5] which can be

2 Channel 4 subsequently aired a documentary called *What British Muslims Really Think*, on April 13, 2016, starring Trevor Phillips as the narrator. The article in the *Sunday Times* was intended to introduce and promote the documentary and its contents.

3 Channel 4, accessed August 10, 2018, http://www.channel4.com/info/press/news/c4-survey-and-documentary-reveals-what-british-muslims-really-think.

4 For an in-depth analysis of the contents and strategies of identification applied in the article, see Aeschbach (2018).

5 In 2017, Twitter increased its limit from 140 to 280 characters (Ahmed 2018).

accessed, retweeted,[6] and replied to (via Twitter's @mention syntax).[7] With presently more than 335 million monthly users worldwide,[8] Twitter is one of the most influential social media platforms and an important social communication channel (Pfaffenberger 2016, p. 13). While in the beginning users mostly published insights into their everyday lives, Twitter increasingly started to be used as a tool for event-following and served not only as a source for real-time information, but also as a space for debates around specific issues derived from politics, news, and entertainment (Bruns 2011, p. 1; Weller et al. 2014, p. xxx).[9] It thereby functions as a back channel to social events and public (media) discussions (Bruns & Burgess 2012, p. 802; Rogers 2014, p. xvi) by providing its users with a platform to react to information and events and by allowing their reactions to potentially be received outside Twitter itself, for example when established print media take up Twitter discussions (Pfaffenberger 2016, pp. 14–15).

The *Sunday Times* article, "An Inconvenient Truth", triggered the creation of the hashtag #WhatBritishMuslimsReallyThink (abbreviated in this article as #WBMRT) on Twitter, with which Twitter users reacted to the exclusionary rhetoric in Trevor Phillips's article. Hashtags[10] facilitate the emergence of discussions on certain topics and events by marking tweets as relevant to the respective topic or event and thereby bundling them together (Bruns & Burgess 2011, p. 5). When recognizing Twitter for its potential to 'talk back', hashtags in particular have been used to contest social discrimination and marginalization (Konnelly 2015, p. 1). In this way, according to Bruns and Burgess (2011, p. 5), the users engaging in communication around a specific hashtag form an ad hoc 'community of interest' or a 'hashtag community'.

The question of community and communitization on the Internet is one of the "greatest challenges for the formation of theories in religious studies and sociology of knowledge of our time" (Krüger 2012, p. 428). This article aims to address this challenge by discussing the potential emergence of community on Twitter using the hashtag #WBMRT as an example of communicative event communalization in a digital public space. After discussing the current state of research in the

6 Retweeting is a well-established practice on Twitter whereby users republish and redistribute original messages. The author of the original tweet is always indicated with the syntax 'RT@username [original message]' (Bruns & Moe 2014, p. 22).

7 Twitter's syntax supports the use of @mentions or @replies (consisting of the @ character followed by the name of the individual user mentioned). By using these textual markers, users mentioned in tweets will be notified directly of any tweets mentioning them or replying to one of their tweets.

8 This number refers to the second quarter of 2018 as measured by the statistical portal Statista, accessed August 13, 2018, https://www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users/.

9 It has been argued that in order to possibly encourage this "move from an ego to a reporting machine" (Rogers 2014, p. xvi), Twitter changed its tagline in 2009 and users, whose tweets had to that point in time been guided by the question "What are you doing?" were now asked "What's happening?"

10 Hashtags consist of keywords preceded by the hash symbol (#) (Bruns & Moe 2014, p. 17). Hashtagged words that become widespread may become 'trending topics', a term used for hashtags identified as popular by a Twitter algorithm. The hashtag #WBMRT was marked as such a trending topic.

area of religion on Twitter, we will present the theoretical framework on community and community building on Twitter, drawing on the differentiation between Twitter as a social network and as a social medium (Murthy 2012, 2013), and introduce a communication-based approach to community building. Based on these considerations, we will analyze the hashtag #WBMRT in order to enrich the theoretical framework with empirical evidence and conceptualize Twitter as a digital space in which fleeting communities may emerge in the process of communicative event communalization.

## 2 State of Research: Religion on Twitter

Previous reflections on religion on Twitter derive largely from work on practical theology in the Anglo-American world. Studies by Clark (2014), Van den Berg (2014), and Williamson (2013), for example, examine the possibilities of Twitter as a tool for spreading religious content.[11] Similarly, O'Lynn investigates how social media may be effectively used to further religious education (2018). Yust, Hyde and Ota understand social media as a means of connecting and establishing social belonging, which they define as a "key theme for spiritual development" (2010, p. 291). Communication scholar Pauline Cheong refers to a series of texts on Twitter as a pedagogical tool "to reinforce the theme of […] Sunday lesson[s]" in evangelical churches or "to maintain relational connectedness beyond the boundaries of established institutional practices" (2010). Drawing on statements by church practitioners, Cheong conceptualizes so-called 'faith tweets'[12] as micro-blogging rituals that lead to a "sense of closeness and religious connected presence among the distributed family of faith believers" (Cheong 2010). This approach is based on "cyber-ritual as performative utterances [that] restructure and reintegrate the minds and emotions of their participants" (Cheong 2010), which leads to strengthening the already existing religious communities. In many of the studies outlined, the assumed media impact is based on expectations of religious actors in the field, such as Christian preachers, who use Twitter pedagogically. While the presupposition of this effectiveness calls for further investigation, scholars in the field of media reception have shown that social media is used to perform religious rituals and potentially share an (emotional) connection.[13]

---

[11] The use of Twitter for spreading religious content is also analyzed from a media-scientific perspective by Boyle in his study of the Twitter presence of the *Mormon Times* (2012).

[12] Examples of faith tweets are those that include the hashtag #pray4me, which is used to describe a problem or issue other Twitter users are invited to pray for (Cheong 2010).

[13] In their study of the tweeting behavior revolving around Michael Jackson's death, where Twitter was used as a public space for mourning and commemoration, Sanderson and Cheong further deepen the approach to ritual practice via Twitter and show that rituals are used to communicate shared feelings (2010, p. 337).

In addition, other studies ask about religious individuals and their tweeting behavior. Chen, Weber and Okulicz-Kozaryn (2014) and Nguyen and Lim (2014) use a quantitative approach to collect information on religious individuals on Twitter. Both studies identify religious individuals on the basis of their self-designation in their short biographies and other profile characteristics, such as particularities of the language used in tweets. In one of the most prominent studies of religion on Twitter, a quantitative 'sentiment analysis' was conducted to compare tweets of Christians to those of atheists. As a result, the study established that Christians present themselves as happier in their tweeting activity (Ritter, Preston & Hernandez 2014).[14] In contrast to these attempts to quantify the religious presence on Twitter, not many qualitative studies have yet been carried out on the religious self-representation of Twitter users. Only the study by Wills and Fecteau (2016), "Humor and Identity on Twitter: #muslimcandyheartrejects as a Digital Space for Identity Construction", deals with the formation of (collective) identity and belonging on Twitter as a social medium. They base their analysis of tweets on humor as a means to communicatively build and reinforce a Muslim diaspora identity. In this way, collective identity (and therefore potentially community) is understood as built through communicatively performed and interactively affirmed identity positions. Further research on religious communities on Twitter and community building via micro-blogging is still lacking.

Lastly, some researchers have dealt with the topic of religious authority on Twitter. Genovese (2017), Guzek (2015), Narbona (2016), and Salazar, Pascual, and Gascon (2016), for example, investigate the Twitter presence and tweeting behavior of Pope Francis,[15] focusing on the content and categorization of individual tweets by goal, topic, and audience. A similar approach is used by Morehouse (2015), who broadens his scope to include the tweeting behavior of religious leaders other than the Pope. Finally, in her research, Cheong examined Twitter feeds by Christian megachurch leaders in order to identify the multiple ways in which scripture is featured in their tweets (2014). Her findings imply that, while digital media has often been conceptualized as disruptive and threatening for traditional and institutionalized authority, Twitter may also be supportive of religious authority and may even have an enhancing effect on authority structures (2014, pp. 4–15). In her most recently published article on religious authority in new media settings,

[14] The profiles analyzed were, however, selected on the basis of the followership of certain public figures. In this way, the followers of five Christian authority figures (e.g., Pope Francis, Joyce Meyer, etc.) and five atheist authority figures (e.g., Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, etc.) were identified as 'Christians' or 'Atheists' respectively (Ritter, Preston & Hernandez 2014, p. 244). Since most of the atheist figures chosen have a strong political agenda, this selection procedure is likely to have influenced the results in terms of the range of emotions voiced by their followers.

[15] Gelfgren discusses not the use of Twitter by the Catholic Church, but rather Church authorities' attitude toward social media in his analysis of the intra-Catholic discussion sparked by a Twitter profile pretending to be the Archbishop of Sweden (2015). Such discussions emphasize the importance of considering the normative evaluation of (new) media within religious communities in the analysis of their religious media presence and use (Krüger 2012, pp. 12–13).

Cheong adopts a communicative perspective on religious authority formation (2017). Drawing on communication research that investigates how organizations (both non-profit and spiritual) are communicatively constituted, Cheong establishes that religious organizations are "conceptualized as emerging *in* communication and living media practices, as discursive exchanges embedded in everyday mediation, transmediation, and remediation processes" (2017, p. 26). If "religious organization is dynamically brought forth in […] communication" (2017, p. 26), Cheong continues, then so is religious authority. In this way, religious authority can be approached by analyzing communicative utterances and interactions, in which authority is (co-)created and maintained (Cheong 2017, p. 28). Expanding on Cheong's insight, this paper draws on the communicative approach elaborated by Knoblauch (2008) to study the formation of religious community. This approach will be outlined below.

## 3 Community Building on Twitter: Theoretical Framework

### 3.1 Community online

The Internet-based mediation[16] of social relationships and collective identities enables inquiries into relationships, belonging, and community formation online (Cheong & Ess 2012, p. 12). Since Tönnies's (1931) formative distinction between the concepts 'community' and 'society', the issue of community has been a central concern in sociological and religious-sociological research (Lüddeckens & Walthert 2018). Initial notions of the community as locally bound, or as naturally occurring in closely connected, spatially limited milieus, led most researchers to initially explore community primarily in terms of local connectedness. While media such as the telephone and the telegraph had already introduced location-independent communication, the advent of the Internet has sparked a new debate on the focus on location-bound community building and the applicability of a concept of community for online interactions and relationships (Gruzd, Wellman & Takhteyev 2011, p. 1295). Many researchers were guided by this face-to-face conceptualization of community and investigated, for instance, to what extent people who interact online also know and meet in locally bound offline spaces and could therefore be seen as a community (Gruzd, Wellman & Takhteyev 2011, pp. 1295–1296). According to Gruzd, Wellman and Takhteyev, this approach might have been practical and fruitful when dealing with digital communication via e-mail or

[16] In this paper, the terms 'mediation' and 'mediated' are used solely with reference to a specific type of communication conveyance. Hence, a communicative action is seen as mediated if it is conveyed via "additional, extra-body technical means" (Knoblauch 2008, p. 81).

networking platforms such as Facebook or Myspace. However, Twitter differs from other social media because the structure of its network is strongly asymmetrical and almost always (at least partially) public. Therefore, the study of community and community building on this platform requires a different framework (Gruzd, Wellman & Takhteyev 2011, p. 1296).

### 3.2 Community building in new media

There are two main research approaches to community building in new media (Murthy 2012). The first approach conceptualizes new media platforms as *social networks* built by digital connections between public and partly-public user profiles (Murthy 2012, p. 1061). In this perspective, the focus lies on the establishment of online connections and the interactions within those networked socialities. The network functionalities of Twitter allow its users to link individual profiles on a structural level via the 'following' function. Unlike other platforms that offer social networking opportunities, the link between profiles on Twitter does not have to be reciprocal; a person who is 'followed' does not have to confirm or reply to this link. According to Huberman, Romero and Wu, this asymmetry of connections may result in little or no interaction between the linked users within a follower network (2009, pp. 2–8). Moreover, users on Twitter often link themselves to others "with different social characteristics to expand their sociability beyond the socially defined boundaries of self-recognition" (Loureiro-Koechlin & Butcher 2013, p. 3), hence Twitter networks are frequently "made up of social networks based on highly diversified and specialised […] weak ties" (Loureiro-Koechlin & Butcher 2013, p. 3). Gruzd, Wellman and Takhteyev understand such networks as communities if there is, with reference to Jones's concept of virtual settlement, "(1) a minimum level of interactivity; (2) a variety of communicators; (3) a minimum level of sustained membership; (4) and a virtual common-public-space where a significant portion of interactive group-CMCs [computer-mediated communication] occur" (Jones 2006), all paired with (5) a "sense of community" (Gruzd, Wellman & Takhteyev 2011, pp. 1298–1312).[17] In order to empirically examine this notion of community, however, the contents published by the networked users have to be included in the investigation.

This level of analysis is the focus of the *second* approach to online community building, in which new media are regarded primarily as *social media* (Murthy 2012, pp. 1061–1062),[18]

[17] In their network analysis approach, Gruzd, Wellman and Takhteyev conceptualize "a sense of community" via individual users' idea of membership, indicated by "the similarity between Wellman's interaction network […] and the mutual (source-follow) network" (2011, p. 1308), their influence (measured via retweeting behavior), the extent of their integration in the network, and the emotional connection shared by the members of a network (2001, pp. 1308–1312).

[18] The differentiation between 'social networks' and 'social media' is based on ideal types that are more complexly linked to each other in reality. In this article, the differentiation is seen as producing analytical perspectives that

characterized by user-generated content that may be shared, responded to, and redistributed. The profiles of the users that are interacting in this manner do not necessarily have to be digitally linked. In this view, community-building processes are investigated with regard to boundaries and similarities portrayed and established in the process of publishing and sharing user-generated content. In Jones's terminology, social media thereby figure as common-public-spaces, in which a "variety of communicators" come together to interact with one another. They thereby potentially share "a sense of community" (Gruzd, Wellman & Takhteyev 2011), which we conceptualize in terms of a shared, communicatively established, identity position as well as the expression of "shared emotions". By focusing on tweeting as a communicative action, this approach's emphasis on communication can be linked to the concept of *Kommunikationsgemeinschaften* (communication community) established by Knoblauch (2008). In communicative acts, community is built in the delineation of 'self' from 'other' and the symbolic marking of an identity that corresponds to an (imagined) community and is associated with shared features (Knoblauch 2008, p. 84).

Viewed in this light, the term 'sustained membership' seems too demanding. Instead of using the term 'membership', we follow Knoblauch, who explains that "participation in these communities is usually indicated by communicative participation, which in turn is secured by the performative or objectified representation of an identity. Belonging to a group is communicatively signaled beforehand, displayed in the respective situation or demonstrated in a performative manner" (Knoblauch 2008, p. 85). A sense of community in terms of affective affiliation with the imagined communal identity can therefore be analyzed in its communicative manifestations.[19]

Advocating a sociological understanding of Twitter as a social medium, Murthy argues that every publication of a tweet is an act of self-representation (Murthy 2012, p. 1062; 2013, p. 27). Even in 'banal' updates, one's own identity can be constructed and reaffirmed (Murthy 2012, p. 1063). Twitter users can display their own interests and opinions as well as actively search for tweets with the same topics via Twitter's search function and signal their affiliation and like-mindedness to the respective tweeters. Twitter can thus become a medium of collective identity building (Zappavigna 2012) and communalization via shared interests and affiliations based on performative self-representation in tweets. The publishing of individual tweets on a certain topic can be understood as a social act in which 'the self' and its relationship to the imagined collective is discursively presented and negotiated (Murthy 2012). A social discourse, seen as "socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned [practice]" (Wodak & Meyer 2009, p. 6), thereby

guide research questions and approaches.

[19] In this view, community is established simultaneous to, or perhaps more accurately, *through* its communicative delineation. Hence, community can be observed by examining the communication that constitutes it. This act of observation may itself be conducted simultaneous to the process of communication; however, depending on the ephemerality of the medium through which the communicative acts are conveyed, the establishment of a *Kommunikationsgemeinschaft* may also be analyzed in hindsight.

produces and reproduces communities by communicatively establishing the boundaries of the collective. This process of boundary making is realized by marking oneself as part of a community, which is symbolized as a distinct unity "insofar as the semantics of self-description insist on unity in terms of descent, religion, place of residence, etc." (Lüddeckens & Walthert 2018, p. 271). The demarcation of a community as a distinct social entity allows ongoing social relationships to become 'communal' in Weber's sense. According to his concept of communitization (*Vergemeinschaftung*), a "social relationship [can be] called 'communal' if and so far as the orientation of social action – whether in the individual case, on the average, or in the pure type – is based on a subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together" (Weber 2013, p. 40).

While communal relationships have mostly been conceptualized as based on clearly delineated, long-term groups, Gebhardt suggests that in fleeting, 'extra-ordinary' situations, event-based communitization takes place (2010). He defines this community as purely momentary and non-permanent social relationships based on perceived togetherness (2010). While Gebhardt's type of event communities are based on the physical participation of individuals and thus on the physical presence of the temporarily communalizing collective, hashtags on Twitter may function as specific online common-public-spaces (Wills & Fecteau 2016). In this way, hashtag discourses enable communicative affirmation of collective identity positions (Konnelly 2015, p. 11; Zappavigna 2012) and of shared emotionality and "subjectively felt belonging" (Weber 1972, p. 21).

In the communicating of shared emotions, a ritual community can evolve, as has been shown in the context of death rituals (Lüddeckens 2018). Walthert further outlined that "situations of collective effervescence, consisting of collectively shared emotions produced in orchestrated interaction of co-presence, and the tendency of individuals to participate in emotionally gratifying situations, lead to solidarity" (2013, p. 117). Both Walthert (2013) and Collins (2009), who investigated the interrelation between shared emotions and group solidarity in interaction rituals, base the process of collective emotion sharing on the bodily co-presences of the involved individuals. In Collins's words and in the spirit of his commentary with regard to telephone communication, the communication of emotions via tweets would probably be described as "pale compared to face-to-face, embodied encounters" (2005, p. 62). However, if one understands communicative action as the basis for (communicating) emotions and forming a community, it becomes apparent that such action does not necessarily have to take place via bodily co-presence (Knoblauch 2008). Indeed, following Knoblauch, the distinction between direct, 'unmediated', face-to-face communication and mediated communication is questionable insofar as "even face to face communication does not take place directly, but through the medium of acoustic signs and

more or less ritualized gestures" (2008, p. 81).[20] Therefore, the presumed 'paleness' of Twitter-based communication is based on a hierarchizing distinction that cannot be maintained. This observation allows us to posit communicative actions per se, including mediated communication via Twitter, as the decisive factor in the development of a sense of community via the communication of a shared positionality as well as shared emotions, online as well as offline. In the following sections, this thesis is illustrated using an empirical study of communalization on the basis of the hashtag #WhatBritishMuslimsReallyThink.

## 4 Case Study: Data and Method

The following considerations are based on data collected in a study on the negotiation of religious and national identity via Twitter, carried out by one of the co-authors of this contribution (Aeschbach 2017, 2018). The data consist of all tweets with the hashtag #WBMRT, collected at regular intervals between April 10 and April 21, 2016, by means of hashtag-based queries via the REST API.[21] The first tweet had not been published more than three days before the first data collection query, and the amount of tweets published with the hashtag never exceeded the rate limitation during the time data was collected.[22] The hashtag was active for 11 days, during which a total of 28,735 tweets with the hashtag #WBMRT were collected.

To perform a qualitative content analysis of the collected data, tweets published in the first 24 hours after the first occurrence of the hashtag #WBMRT were selected as a sample. This resulted in a total of 2,134 tweets, including information on the date and time of publication, username of the author, text of the tweet (with hashtags and @mentions), possible hyperlinks,[23] and retweet counts. Of the 2,134 tweets, 76% were retweets. After the removal of the retweets, empty tweets and those otherwise non-retrievable, 502 original tweets, published by 237 Twitter users, were included in the

[20] With reference to Derrida, Knoblauch continues to state that "in purely phenomenological terms, there can be no direct communication anyway. Communication is, by definition, mediation" (2008, p. 9).

[21] Twitter's REST (Representational State Transfer) API is an interface that allows for multiple active approaches to data collection based on the traditional pull method enabling the researcher to request data from the server (Gaffney & Puschmann 2014, pp. 56–58). Thereby, tweets can only be gathered within a timeframe of 7 days after their publication. Information was gathered by means of the web-based tool TAGS (Twitter Archiving Google Spreadsheet), which accesses Twitter's REST API (Gaffney & Puschmann 2014, p. 56).

[22] The REST API is limited by a rate restriction that only allows for 180 search requests per hour, with 100 tweets per request. Hence, it was possible for 18,000 tweets to be gathered per hour.

[23] Hyperlinks, or simply links, direct other users to documents outside of Twitter. Twitter's restriction in terms of character number has led to the introduction of various URL shortening services that allow users to include hyperlinks to articles, websites, pictures, and other multimedia content in their tweets (Rogers 2014, p. x).

in-depth content analysis. In the following, the analyzed data are discussed with regard to how community was built in the communicative tweeting activity.

## 5 #WhatBritishMuslimsReallyThink: Communalization in an Event-Based Hashtag

### 5.1 Interactivity of a variety of communicators

As indicated above, Gruzd, Wellman and Takhteyev (2011) understand "a variety of communicators" with "a minimum of interactivity" (Jones 2006) and "a sense of community" as indicative of an online community. Twitter in general, and specific hashtag formations in particular, can be seen as virtual common-public-spaces in which computer-mediated communication between a variety of actors with at least a minimal level of interactivity may occur (Jones 2006; Wills & Fecteau 2016). #WBMRT exhibits several of those features: the hashtag serves as a particular public space in which a range of different users participate. While it is possible that many people followed the hashtag passively, only those who actively participated, either by publishing or retweeting, marked themselves as part of the temporary hashtag community. Moreover, in the hashtag discourse, the users interacted with one another and one another's content in two main ways.[24] On the one hand, Twitter users directly engaged with one another through the use of the textual marker @mention. In the tweets analyzed, 74 included an @mention, with 46 mentioning other individual Twitter users (many of whom were active in the hashtag discussion), 13 mentioning figures of public interest, and 11 mentioning media or political institutions. While some @mentions can be understood as attempts to start a direct dialogue with the mentioned user,[25] many are references to public figures or institutions. Those mentions can, however, be regarded as interactive at least on the level of interpellation.

On the other hand, users interacted by retweeting. Retweeting (sometimes abbreviated as RT) can be compared to a form of citation via which certain topics and information can be spread quickly and widely (Autenrieth 2010, p. 219). High retweet counts have been understood as indicative of tweets that are weighted as important, relevant, or especially interesting by other Twitter users (Autenrieth 2010; Wills & Fecteau 2016). In this analysis, retweet counts are seen as

[24] Another way of interacting on Twitter is by means of favoring specific tweets. Data with regard to favoring, however, have not been captured for this study.

[25] Overall, relatively few direct public conversations emerged within the hashtag activity. This could be due to the fact that tweets that start with @mentions are removed from the public domain by Twitter (Bruns & Moe 2014, p. 22). It was therefore not possible to gather such tweets by search requests, which means that direct, private conversations containing the hashtag have gone unrecorded.

indicative of a certain level of interactivity between the Twitter users and may cautiously be regarded as indicators of specific content considered important or worthy of retweeting within the hashtag discourse.[26] Of the analyzed tweets, nearly half were retweeted at least once, with the most popular one – "If only Adele said Salaam instead of Hello..."[27] – being retweeted 213 times. In this way, it could be argued that it was possible for the participating Twitter users to hold the reasonable expectation that other users would react to their tweets in some way. In some tweets, it became clear that provoking such a reaction was an explicit goal, for instance in the tweet, "How do I write a RT-worthy tweet for this hashtag?" The same user continued to write three more tweets, two of which ("I should probably be doing work instead of tweeting right now" and "When will we stop having to prove our humanity?") were finally retweeted. In this way, retweeting can be interpreted as users marking a tweet as relevant to the hashtag discourse and thereby validating the author of the retweeted tweet as part of the communicative community. Hence, the pursuit of writing a "RT-worthy tweet for this [particular!] hashtag" can be seen as an attempt to performatively signal belonging to the tweeting community (by writing a tweet) and as the hope of being acknowledged as part of it (by being retweeted). In this way, communal belonging is not understood on the basis of membership, but is shown by way of communicative participation as well as symbolic marking or situational performance of an identity imagined to be shared by the community (Knoblauch 2008, p. 85).

### 5.2 Sense of community: Shared identity position

The hypothesis of community as being established through a 'sense of community' raises the question of how the construction of such a sense may be empirically observed. The idea of a shared identity position plays a decisive role in establishing a basis for perceived togetherness. In our data, the overall communal identity was marked as the collective of 'British Muslims'. Twitter users who self-identified as 'British Muslims' came together in order to fight the negative portrayal in the *Sunday Times*. The broader 'British Muslim' identity category thereby functioned as the basis on which the ad hoc community was formed. The hashtag itself is already a symbolic marker of this identity position, which the tweeting users adopt for themselves. Moreover, the hashtag includes a linguistic delineation of the group as 'British Muslims', in contrast to all Muslims or to British people in general. This already refers to a group identity that is both differentiated from other groups and an entity to which the participants can self-referentially relate.

[26] The number of retweets of a given tweet is, however, not solely dependent on its content, but may also vary according to the status of its author.

[27] Adele is a popular British singer-songwriter whose song "Hello (2015) reached number one in the pop music charts of numerous countries.

This 'British Muslim' collective can be understood as an 'imagined community' in Benedict Anderson's sense. Central to Anderson's argument, which he developed to discuss the rise of the national state, is the notion that a national community is established through the invention and creation of an image of a shared community conveyed through media-based communication. Anderson primarily points to the invention of the printing press as a central factor that made it possible to construct a shared image of a national community and publicly shared national narratives and debates, in which the limits of the collective are negotiated (2006 [1983]). On this level, as outlined by Knoblauch, communication communities are not without tradition, but may rather be based on a tradition in the sense of shared knowledge that is required for meaningful communicative action (2008, p. 85). The role of this shared knowledge can be seen in many tweets published in the hashtag discourse, where jokes were based on juxtapositions only meaningful to those acquainted with the concepts referred to.[28] In tweets such as "If only Adele said Salaam instead of Hello..." or "Is this @NandosUK halal?", for instance, a certain knowledge of the Arabic language and of the Islamic concept of halal, as well as familiarity with British pop culture and the popular British food chain Nando's, are necessary to make sense of the humorous tweets. Hence, on this level, the hashtag's common identity was based on the imagined community of British Muslims through both the overt reference to British Muslim as a collective identity category and the reference to knowledge of norms, rules, and further elements implicitly tied to it.

In order to (successfully) participate and performatively represent oneself as part of the hashtag community, knowledge of the specific culture of communication in the hashtag and its reproduction in the tweets as a marker of belonging is required. This means being aware of the communicative conventions not only on Twitter but specifically around the hashtag #WBMRT, including the range of content discussed, the underlying tone, and the ideological direction pursued by the communicatively established community. It is on this level that the particularities of the established community can be identified. First and foremost, most tweets written with the hashtag #WBMRT were humorous. Although a substantial number of tweets (115) did voice outrage toward the published article or assumed a direct, negative attitude toward the content published by the *Sunday Times*, the largest number of tweets did not directly engage with the article, but rather constituted humorous articulations referring to daily experiences, in which a contrast to the marginalizing portrayal made in the article was drawn. The intention for the hashtag to be used in such a way is evident in the first two tweets, in which the hashtag was introduced:

[28] For a similar analysis of humorous tweets, see Wills & Fecteau (2016).

(1) *What time is the match on tomorrow? #WhatBritishMuslimsReallyThink [image]*[29]

(2) *I think I'll have some crisps. #WhatBritishMuslimsReallyThink [image]*

In these two tweets, two mundane references, namely interest in a British sports team and a craving for crisps, were made in order to establish an image of "what British Muslims really think" that contrasted with the one given in the article. This type of humor was taken up in the majority of tweets, with 60% of the tweets referring to everyday life activities and interests, such as food and drink (98 tweets), work and household (33 tweets), clothes and fashion (20 tweets), travel (14 tweets), routine daily activities (14 tweets), concerns about the weather (7 tweets), and pop culture, including references to the entertainment industry (56 tweets) and sports (30 tweets).

Most of these tweets have the same structure: an interest in or concern about an everyday reality or a reference to a public person or pop culture series is expressed as a typical thought of a British Muslim, or rather of the British Muslim tweeting. In this way, tweets such as "I'm craving Indian cuisine", "Why is the weekend only two days?" and "I must reread @jk_rowling's Harry Potter series and @AuthorDanBrown's books again. The best. #bibliophile" all served to descandalize the British Muslim identity by foregrounding an everyday, mundane field of interest. In this way, the threatening and ideologically charged characteristics the article assigns to British Muslims were ridiculed. Moreover, by presenting themselves as equally occupied with the same everyday life interests and problems as other people in general and British people in particular, e.g., "It's raining again! British weather is so unpredictable" or "What's best, sugar before milk in your cuppa or milk then sugar?" the tweets further established a certain sameness that negates the exclusionary rhetoric of the article. In some tweets, this portrayal of sameness was made explicit, as in "Living according to the stated 'British Values' is pretty easy as in many ways Islam requires the same of us" or "Do Christians know that we really love Jesus (peace be upon him) as well?" Similarly, tweets concerned with political content referred to a shared interest in British politics, such as the repeatedly voiced wish for David Cameron, the British prime minister at the time, to resign. Overall, however, there were few tweets that directly engaged with political issues, indicating that the purpose of the hashtag was achieved by witty references to everyday life and pop culture rather than by remarks on politics, which may have further served to depoliticize the established community.

In rejecting the constitutive demarcation inherent in the logic of the article, British Muslims presented themselves as part of the British national community. At the same time, however, British Muslims are marked as a distinct community with reference to their religion. Nearly 22% of all

[29] Both tweets included an image of the *Sunday Times* with the headline of the respective article in order to establish the object of reference.

tweets (104) included references to religion in general or Islam in particular, including rituals, concepts, clothing, or vocabulary connected to those religions. Interestingly, almost no theological discussions were conducted. Rather, tweets that referenced religiosity were mostly connected to everyday life interests and worries, for instance, "Why can't all Subways [fast-food chain] be halal?" or "y [why] does Ramadan have to come in June when the weather is peng [great]?" Thus, the topic discussed in the hashtag was everyday religious practice, or the question of how religious practice can be integrated and implemented in everyday life. In some tweets, there was also a certain normalization of religiosity as a mundane part of everyday life, for example when the question of the color combination of clothing and hijab was raised: "Does my hijab match my dress?" In the interest of depoliticizing and descandalizing Muslim identity, potentially ideological beliefs of a religion were de-emphasized and personal needs of religious practice in everyday life highlighted.

In sum, the majority of the hashtag's communication consists of witty tweets that create humor by contrasting the scandalizing third-party image the article presents with the everyday, banal worries and interests of the tweeting participants. The strategic shift in emphasis, from the ideological value systems debated in the article to mundane thoughts and practices discussed in the tweets, paves the way for an image of the nation as a plural and multi-faceted community construct in which British Muslims can simultaneously be distinct and still be part of Britain. By reiterating and rephrasing this recognizable type of humor, belonging to the event-based hashtag community is expressed and the common identity position as open-minded, pop-culture savvy, de-scandalized, and depoliticized tweeting British Muslims is marked and adopted through the communicative act of tweeting.

### 5.3 A sense of community: Shared emotional affiliation

In addition to establishing a common identity position, a sense of community was also constructed through communicating shared emotional affiliation. A first range of emotions[30] shared in the hashtag was event-based and expressed in terms of outrage and aversion to the *Sunday Times* article, the study it was based on, and its author, Trevor Phillips. Such anger was communicated through devaluating and emotional language, as for example in the following tweets: "[…] what an Islamophobic wazzock [idiot] Trevor Phillips turned out to be", and "[A] poll based on 1,000 people represents over 5,000,000 British Muslims. That's stupid." This emotional thrust was further

[30] 'Emotion' is a polysemic category; emotions have "to be understood within a particular cultural and historical context" (Lüddeckens 2006, p. 546). They are "generally defined in terms of other terms like 'feelings' and 'affect' that are themselves defined in terms of each other" (Turner 2009, p. 341). For the purposes of this article, we understand the communication of emotions as the communication of aspects that are generally acknowledged as or associated with personal experiences, such as happiness, sadness, fear, and anger (Turner 2009, p. 342).

emphasized by the use of swear words, e.g., "Stop fucking alienating minorities", and punctuation, both with exclamation points: "Stop thinking about us!" and repetitive punctuation: "What does the Sunday Times say I really think??" While most of the anger expressed in the tweets was directed toward the article's content or premises, other tweets expressed displeasure with David Cameron and framed the article as an attempt to distract attention from this political issue: "Nice try by @MailOnline to distract #CameronResign with headline of #bigotry below! @David_Cameron should resign #panamapapers"; "We must neither relent nor get distracted by stories like #WhatBritishMuslimsReallyThink. Yes, #SCAMeron OUT." There were many variations on this theme in the Twitterfeed: "I know this #WhatBritishMuslimsReallyThink channel 4 documentary [based on the article] will be stupid and ignorant so I won't even bother watching it"; "Same old shite by the liberal fascist Trevor Philips"; "Want to know #WhatBritishMuslimsReallyThink? #ResignDavidCameron obviously!", "#ResignDavid-Cameron obvs!", etc. In this way, anger specific to both the article as an event and a British political situation was made into an emotion shared within the communicative community by both repeating and repeatedly acknowledging (via retweets) the shared feeling.[31]

In addition to anger, shared worry, sadness, and exhaustion were triggered by the article. These feelings were conveyed mostly lexically by explicitly stating the emotional state of the Twitter user, for instance, "Kinda tired talking about Islam especially when it's not on our own terms"; "Sigh. This is soooo tiresome and passé. Can't we just be treated like everyone else?" Moreover, a feeling of anxiety about being discriminated against was repeatedly voiced. On the one hand, one source of the worries was state surveillance targeting Muslims, especially with regard to problems while traveling: "I hope some racist doesn't get me kicked off @easyJet for flying while Muslim in a couple of weeks"; "When's the next time I'm going to be stopped and searched at the airport?" On the other hand, concerns were published specifically on how the hijab marks the wearing Muslima as a potential target of harassment. Twitter users expressed the fear of possibly being harassed: "Am I going to get harassed because of my hijab?" as well as a sense of solidarity with others sharing this worry: "So angry & worried that my hijab wearing sisters are afraid but resolute (& so proud 2) when they go out." The fear of and anger about experiences of discrimination were expressed not only in a direct and explicit fashion, but were also conveyed in humorous tweets. In those tweets, humor may have served as an outlet to relieve tension. In line with the findings of Wills and Fecteau (2016), the dominant topic of the tweets using humor for tension relief was terrorism and state surveillance, as demonstrated in the tweet "Is it extreme to yell 'Allahu akbar' when new British period drama comes out?"

[31] With regard to the importance of the communication of (shared) emotions for communities, see Collins (2005, 2009) and Lüddeckens (2006).

Lastly, a variety of everyday emotions were shared in the tweets. The emotions expressed in such tweets included surprise, sadness, anger, and joy. These emotions were conveyed by means of emotional lexicalization: "I love John Hughes movies"; punctuation: "How did the weekend end so quickly!!?"; capitalization: "Rachel and Ross were NOT on a break";[32] as well as with emoticons: "Why do we have to wait till 2017 for the next #Sherlock?!? *crying emoticon*."[33] While those tweets expressed a broad variety of emotions that were not all directly repeated in other tweets, they can be interpreted in light of their day-to-day relevance. In this way, those tweets may be viewed as conveying a shared emotional investment in everyday life and pop culture. This emphasis on the centrality of everyday issues may again be interpreted as an attempt to dissociate the presented self-image from the one given in the article, where Muslims were portrayed as potentially dangerous and politically challenging, and to thereby depoliticize and descandalize the image of British Muslims.

Overall, the particular range of emotions elaborated, namely a shared outrage toward the article, worry with regard to discrimination, and a shared emotional proximity to everyday happenings and pop culture themes, are indicative of the communicative conventions that formed around the hashtag.

### 5.4 Event-based communalization

In the reaction to the *Sunday Times* article "An Inconvenient Truth", the hashtag #WBMRT facilitated temporary and event-specific emotional affiliation via tweeting. In the sense of Gebhardt's fleeting event communalization, the hashtag can thus be interpreted as a temporary event during which community is established through shared emotions. To be more precise, we argue that this community is established by communicating shared emotions as well as a shared identity position. However, unlike in Gebhardt's examples, the emotional participation was not triggered by an event with a festive, out-of-the-ordinary character, but rather by the article in the *Sunday Times*, which was not received as an "out-of-the-ordinary" event by the participants of the hashtag.[34] Moreover, while Gebhardt conceptualizes the anonymity of an event as a possibility to 'disrobe', i.e. to lower the 'embarrassment thresholds' and to act without fear of consequences (2010, p. 183), the ad hoc Twitter community around the hashtag #WBMRT showed no such signs

[32] This tweet refers to the popular TV series *Friends* and the debate around the relationship between two of the characters therein. The tweet above can be read as an indirect reaction to another tweet published in the hashtag discourse, namely "Ross and Rachel were on a break."

[33] In this tweet, the Twitter user was lamenting the ending of the current season of the popular British TV series *Sherlock*.

[34] This sense that the publication of the *Sunday Times* article was one in a series of similar events is voiced in tweets such as, "Oh here we go again... after switching off British news channels!" and "Same old shite by the liberal fascist Trevor Philips."

of a lack of inhibition as the sharing of intimate biographical remarks. Hence, it is not through the experience of emotions that are only possible in an extraordinary happening that community is built, but rather, with this hashtag, through the communication of emotions[35] and convictions specific to and shared at a particular, temporally limited event by the participating Twitter users. The hashtag analyzed can thus be seen as a situational event community insofar as the social relationships are not established to be permanent, but purely momentary and based on hashtag- and event-specific emotional affiliation.

## 6 Conclusion

In the analysis of #WBMRT, we argued that Twitter can be seen as a virtual common-public-space in which situational event-based communitization can evolve via mediated, spatially detached communication. Drawing on the concept of online community as specified by Jones (2006), we showed that the hashtag was used by a variety of communicators to interact, and that they established a 'sense of community' by communicatively expressing and affirming a shared identity position as well as a range of mutually shared emotions. In the case of #WBMRT, we see this community as emerging *ad hoc* in the establishment of event-based, emotional affiliation. Furthermore, Gebhardt's (2010) theory on fleeting event communities allows us to understand the temporal volatility of event-based interaction as community building. This ephemeral community, constituted by a shared sense of identity and emotional affiliation of the Twitter users participating in the hashtag discourse, is (re-) produced and consolidated in the tweets, understood as communicative actions. In this way, #WBMRT is understood as a public space in which a 'communicative community' (*Kommunikationsgemeinschaft*, Knoblauch 2008) is situationally formed in the process of social media-based communication.

In this particular case, the temporary communalization of the Twitter users was facilitated by the comprehensive category 'British Muslims', itself understood as a communicatively established imagined community. In the construction of the particular 'British Muslim selves' of the tweeting participants, the exclusion of Muslims in Phillips's portrayal of Britishness was rejected. In the simultaneous marking of British 'Muslims' as a different and distinct group *and* as part of the British nation, an alleged incompatibility between Muslimness and Britishness was negated. This implicitly creates an image of Britishness that invites consideration of the British national community as multidimensional and inclusive.

[35] Roberts et al. (2012) argue that the fact that tweets are written in real time leads to more emotion-laden corpora. For sentiment analysis of tweets, see also Pak & Paroubek (2010).

The example of #WBMRT demonstrates that digitally mediated communication on Twitter may be interpreted as a form of communitization. Based on the discourse analyzed, we further argue that the communication of shared identity positions and shared emotions may be seen as essential in the communicative community-building process. In conclusion, we stipulate that it is necessary not only to take seriously the relevance of mediated communication for the establishment of individual subjectivities and collective belonging, but also to further investigate the potential significance of communicatively shared emotions in community building online.

## References

Aeschbach, M 2017, '# WhatBritishMuslimsReallyThink: Negotiating religious and national identity on Twitter', *Zeitschrift für junge Religionswissenschaft*, vol. 12, pp. 1–6.

Aeschbach, M 2018, *Negotiating British Muslim Identity on Twitter: #WhatBritishMuslimsReallyThink: Investigating a Hashtag Discourse*, AkademikerVerlag, Berlin.

Autenrieth, UP & Herwig, J 2010, 'Zwischen begrenzten Mitteln und komplexen Strukturen: Gemeinschaftsorientierte Kommunikation und Interaktion auf Microblogging-Plattformen am Beispiel Twitter', in *Freundschaft und Gemeinschaft im Social Web*, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden-Baden.

Ahmed, W 2018, 'More room for greater depth and detail: Implications for academic research of Twitter's expanded character limit', *Impact of Social Sciences Blog*, viewed 13.08.18, http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/88756/

Anderson, B 2006 [1983], *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London.

Boyle, K 2012, 'Latter-day tweets: The Mormon Times's use of Twitter as a reporting tool', *Journal of Media & Religion*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 189–199.

Bruns, A 2011, 'New methodologies for researching news discussion on Twitter', paper presented to The Future of Journalism, Cardiff, UK.

Bruns, A & Burgess, J 2011, 'The use of Twitter hashtags in the formation of ad hoc publics', in *Proceedings of the 6th European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) General Conference 2011*, Reykjavik.

Bruns, A & Burgess, J 2012, 'Researching New Discussion on Twitter', *Journalism Studies*, vol. 13, no. 5/6, pp. 801–814.

Bruns, A & Moe, H 2014, 'Structural layers of communication on Twitter', in K Weller, A Bruns, J Burgess, M Mahrt & C Puschmann (eds), *Twitter and Society*, Peter Lang, New York.

Chen, L, Weber, I & Okulicz-Kozaryn, A 2014, 'US religious landscape on Twitter', *International Conference on Social Informatics*, pp. 544–660.

Cheong, PH 2010, 'Faith tweets: Ambient religious communication and microblogging rituals', *M/C Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2, online.

Cheong, PH 2014, 'Tweet the message? Religious authority and social media innovation', *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 1–19.

Cheong, PH 2017, 'The vitality of new media and religion: Communicative perspectives, practices, and changing authority in spiritual organization', *New Media & Society*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 25–33.

Clark, MJ 2014, 'Using twitter to practice Christian ethics: Technology and accompaniment', *Teaching Theology & Religion*, vol. 17, no. 3, p. 223.

Collins, R 2005, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Collins, R 2009, 'Social movements and the focus of emotional attention', in J Goodwin, JM Jasper & F Polletta (eds), *Passionate politics: Emotions and social movements*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Gaffney, D & Puschmann, C 2014, 'Data collection on Twitter', in K Weller, A Bruns, J Burgess, M Mahrt & C Puschmann (eds), *Twitter and Society*, Peter Lang, New York.

Gebhardt, W 2010, 'Flüchtige Gemeinschaften: Eine kleine Theorie situativer Event-Vergemeinschaftung', in D Lüddeckens & R Walthert (eds), *Fluide Religion: Neue religiöse Bewegungen im Wandel*, transcript, Bielefeld.

Gelfgren, S 2015, 'Why does the Archbishop not tweet? How social media challenge church authorities', *Nordicom Review*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 109–123.

Genovese, F 2017, 'Politics @Pontifex: International crises and political patterns of papal tweets', pp. 1–17, http://federica-genovese.com/downloads/popetweets_rep.zip

Gruzd, A, Wellman, B & Takhteyev, Y 2011, 'Imagining Twitter as an imagined community', *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 55, no. 10, pp. 1294–1318.

Guzek, D 2015, 'Discovering the digital authority: Twitter as reporting tool for papal activities', *Online–Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, vol. 9, pp. 63–80.

Huberman, BA, Romero, DM & Wu, F 2009, 'Social networks that matter: Twitter under the microscope', *First Monday*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 1–9.

Jones, Q 2006, 'Virtual-communities, virtual settlements & cyber-archaeology: A theoretical outline', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 3, no. 3, online.

Khiabany, G & Williamson, M 2008, 'Veiled bodies—Naked racism: Culture, politics and race in the sun', *Race & Class*, vol. 50, no. 2, pp. 69–88.

Knoblauch, H 2008, 'Kommunikationsgemeinschaften', in R Hitzler, A Honer & M Pfadenhauer (eds), *Posttraditionale Gemeinschaften. Theoretische und ethnografische Erkundungen*, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden.

Konnelly, A 2015, '# Activism: Identity, affiliation, and political discourse-making on Twitter', *The Arbutus Review*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 1–16.

Krüger, O 2012, *Die mediale Religion: Probleme und Perspektiven der religionswissenschaftlichen und wissenssoziologischen Medienforschung*, transcript, Bielefeld.

Kundnani, A 2007, 'Integrationism: The politics of anti-Muslim racism', *Race & Class*, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 24–44.

Loureiro-Koechlin, C & Butcher, T 2013, 'The emergence of converging communities via Twitter', *The Journal of Community Informatics*, vol. 9, no. 3, online.

Lüddeckens, D 2006, 'Emotion', in J Kreinath, JAM Snoek & M Stausberg (eds), *Theorizing Rituals. Vol. 1: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, Brill, Leiden.

Lüddeckens, D 2018, 'Alternative death rituals in Switzerland: Building a community of shared emotions and practices', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, vol. 33, no. 1, pp. 107–121.

Lüddeckens, D & Walthert, R 2018, 'Religiöse Gemeinschaft', in D Pollack, V Krech, O Müller & H Markus (eds), *Handbuch Religionssoziologie*, Springer-VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden.

Moore, K, Mason, P & Lewis, JMW 2008, 'Images of Islam in the UK: The representation of British Muslims in the national print news media 2000-2008'.

Morehouse, J 2015, 'Favorite for Jesus, retweet for Buddha: A content analysis of religious leaders on Twitter', MA Thesis, University of Houston.

Murthy, D 2012, 'Towards a sociological understanding of social media: Theorizing Twitter', *Sociology*, vol. 46, no. 6, pp. 1059–1073.

Murthy, D 2013, *Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Narbona, J 2016, 'Digital leadership, Twitter and Pope Francis', *Church, Communication and Culture*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 90–109.

Nguyen, MT & Lim, EP 2014, 'On predicting religion labels in microblogging networks', paper presented to Proceedings of the 37th international ACM SIGIR conference on Research & development in information retrieval, Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia.

O'Lynn, R 2018, '"If you'll tweet along with me": Effectively using social media in religious education', in J. Hilton (ed.), *Teaching Religion Using Technology in Higher Education*, Routledge, New York.

Pak, A & Paroubek, P 2010, 'Twitter as a corpus for sentiment analysis and opinion mining', *LREC*, vol. 10, pp. 1320–1326

Pfaffenberger, F 2016, *Twitter als Basis wissenschaftlicher Studien: Eine Bewertung gängiger Erhebungs- und Analysemethoden der Twitter-Forschung*, Springer Fachmedien, Wiesbaden.

Phillips, T 2016, 'An Inconvenient Truth', *The Sunday Times Magazine*.

Poole, E & Richardson, JE 2010, *Muslims and the News Media*, IB Tauris, London.

Ritter, RS, Preston, JL & Hernandez, I 2014, 'Happy tweets: Christians are happier, more socially connected, and less analytical than atheists on Twitter', *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 243–249.

Roberts, K, Roach, MA, Johnson, J, Guthrie, J & Harabagiu, SM 2012, 'EmpaTweet: Annotating and detecting emotions on Twitter', *LREC*, vol. 12, pp. 3806–3813.

Rogers, R 2014, 'Debanalising Twitter: The transformation of an object of study', in K Weller, A Bruns, J Burgess, M Mahrt & C Puschmann (eds), *Twitter and Society*, Peter Lang, New York.

Salazar, CD, Pascual, JM & Gascon, JFF 2016, 'Political leadership in the digital age: An analysis of the use of Twitter by Pope Francisco (@Pontifex)', *Obra Digital: Revista De Comunicación*, vol. 11, pp. 85–98.

Sanderson, J & Cheong, PH 2010, 'Tweeting prayers and communicating grief over Michael Jackson online', *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, vol. 30, no. 5, pp. 328–340.

Tönnies, F 1931, 'Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft', in A Vierkandt (ed.), *Handwörterbuch der Soziologie*, Ferdinand Enke, Stuttgart.

Van den Berg, JA 2014, 'The story of the hashtag (#): A practical theological tracing of the hashtag (#) symbol on Twitter', *HTS Theological Studies*, vol. 70, no. 1, pp. 1–6.

Walthert, R 2013, 'Emotion, ritual, and the individual: The production of community in Evangelicalism', *Journal of Religion in Europe*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 90–119.

Weber, M 1972, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*, J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen.

Weber, M 2013, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, 4th edn, Routledge, Berkley.

Weller, K, Bruns, A, Burgess, J, Mahrt, M & Puschmann, C 2014, 'Twitter and society: An introduction', in K Weller, A Bruns, J Burgess, M Mahrt & C Puschmann (eds), *Twitter and Society*, Peter Lang, New York.

Williamson, R 2013, 'Using Twitter to Teach Reader-Oriented Biblical Interpretation: "Tweading" the Gospel of Mark', *Teaching Theology & Religion*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 274–286.

Wills, ER & Fecteau, A 2016, 'Humor and identity on Twitter: #muslimcandyheartrejects as a digital space for identity construction', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 32–45.

Yust, KM, Hyde, B & Ota, C 2010, 'Cyber spirituality: Facebook, Twitter, and the adolescent quest for connection', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 291–293.

Zappavigna, M 2012, *Discourse of Twitter and Social Media: How we Use Language to Create Affiliation on the Web*, Continuum International Publishing Group, New York and London.

## Biography

MIRJAM AESCHBACH, MA, is a research and teaching assistant and doctoral researcher in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. For her doctoral thesis, *Shaping the Boundaries of National Belonging: Muslim Women in Switzerland across German-speaking Media Platforms*, she is conducting a qualitative media analysis of how national belonging is shaped by Muslim women in a German-speaking, trans-media discourse. Her research interests include religion and politics in media discourses, digital religion, gender and religion, and Islam in contemporary Europe.

Contact: mirjam.aeschbach@rws.uzh.ch

Prof. Dr. DOROTHEA LUEDDECKENS is Professor of the Study of Religions with a focus on social sciences in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. Her research foci lie in qualitative-empirical research of contemporary religion in Western Europe and contemporary Zoroastrianism, ranging from studies regarding dying and death to research on religion and medicine. She has directed the research projects "Visible Markers of Religious Identity in Public Debate" and "Alternative Religiosity/Spirituality at the End of Life".